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Gatewood Reservoir: Jewel of the Ridge and Valley



**John R. Copeland, Fisheries Biologist, Blacksburg Office
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Gatewood Reservoir is nestled in the hills of southwestern Pulaski County in the Eastern Divide Ranger District of the George Washington/Jefferson National Forest. A 162-acre water supply impoundment owned by the Town of Pulaski, it is a scenic lake where you can still “get away from it all” for a day. Gatewood is a great place to bring the family for a picnic, camping, or fishing. Facilities include a campground, picnic areas, nature trails, and wilderness camping. With its remote location, peaceful surroundings, and the added benefit of great angling opportunities, Gatewood Reservoir is an untapped “Jewel of the Ridge and Valley”.

Fish populations at Gatewood Reservoir are sampled in May by Department fish biologists using electrofishing. “Electrofishing” is a fish collection technique that uses a boat-mounted generator and voltage regulator to put an electric shock into the water. The shock affects fish that swim near the boat’s electric field. The electric field is limited to an area within a few feet around the boat. “Electroshocked” fish actually swim toward

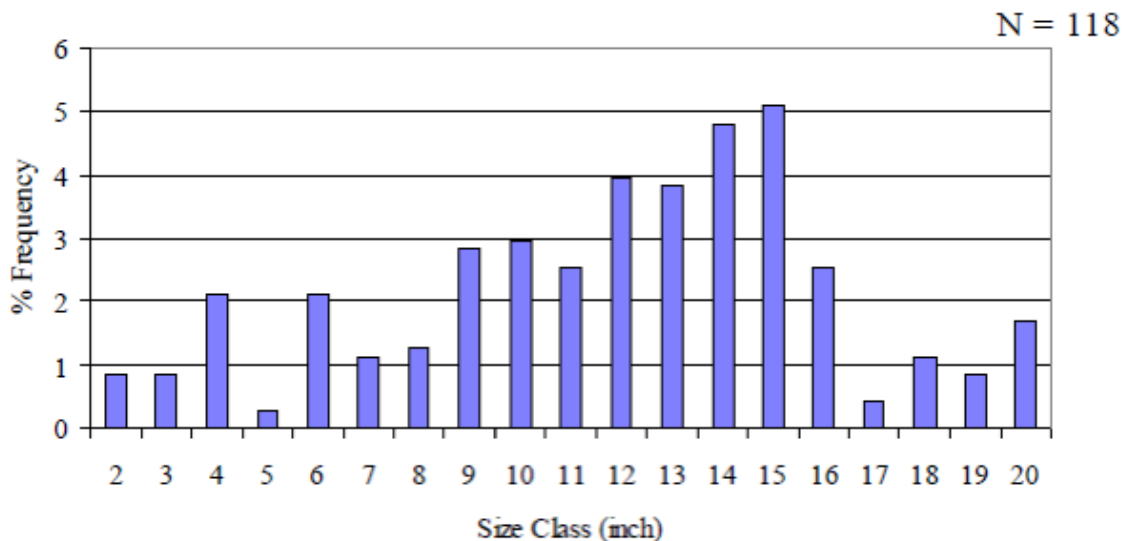
booms dangling off the front of the boat, where they are temporarily stunned and can be netted by biologists. Fish collected during electrofishing surveys are measured, weighed, and released back into the lake. Length information from collected fish gives biologists an indication of spawning success and whether there are good numbers of fish for anglers to catch. Weight information tells biologists whether these fish are in good condition. Time spent electrofishing is recorded so biologists can measure catch rates of each species and compare this information between years.

The main species collected by electrofishing at Gatewood Reservoir are Largemouth Bass, Bluegill, Redear Sunfish, and Black Crappie. Between 2001 and 2018, collections of these species indicate that reproduction is consistent from year to year. In addition, catch rates for these species have been stable or increasing, indicating these populations are not overfished.

Largemouth Bass

Largemouth Bass sizes during electrofishing from 2001 to 2018 were consistent. During these years, between 60 and 80 percent of the adult Largemouth Bass (over 8 inches long) collected were over 12 inches long and 21 to 43 percent of the adult Largemouth Bass were over 15 inches long. Anglers will find good numbers of 12 to 15 inch Largemouth Bass during 2020 and future years (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Sizes of Largemouth Bass collected from Gatewood Reservoir during May 2018 electrofishing. The total number collected was 118.



Bluegill and Redear Sunfish

For many years, Bluegill and Redear Sunfish were the main attractions at this clear water lake. Yellow Perch were introduced sometime between 2001 and 2005, impacting Bluegill and Redear Sunfish populations. Based on the May 2018 sample, the

Bluegill population is stunted, with most Bluegill in the 3 to 4 inch size range (Figure 2). The Redear Sunfish population is in good shape, with plenty of sunfish between 5 and 9 inches available (Figure 3). Catching large sunfish at the lake is easiest during the peak spawning time between mid-May and mid-June. When fishing at other times of the year, look for these sunfish in deeper water near woody debris.

Figure 2: Sizes of Bluegill collected from Gatewood Reservoir during May 2018 electrofishing. The total number collected was 77.

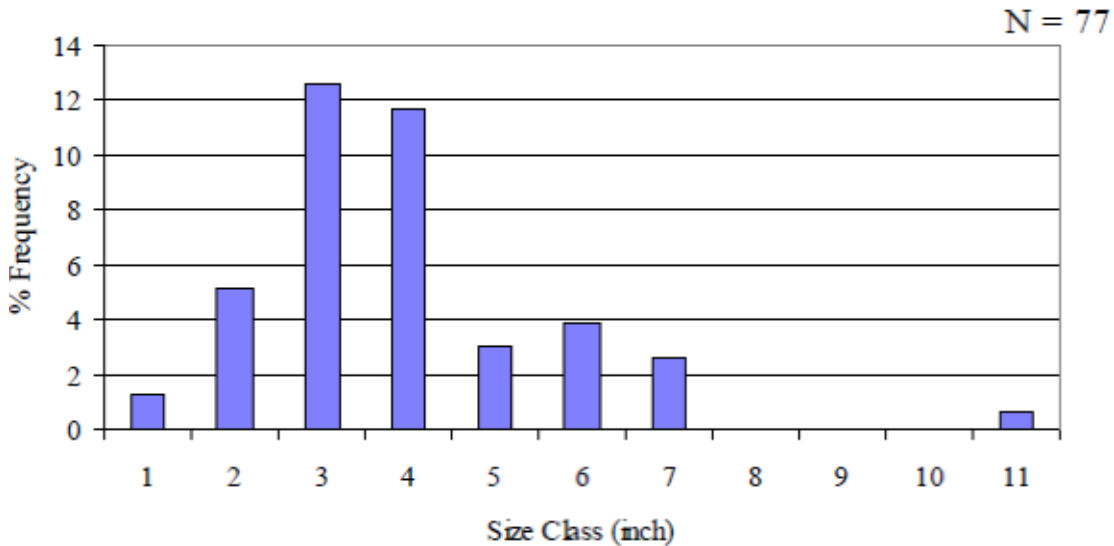
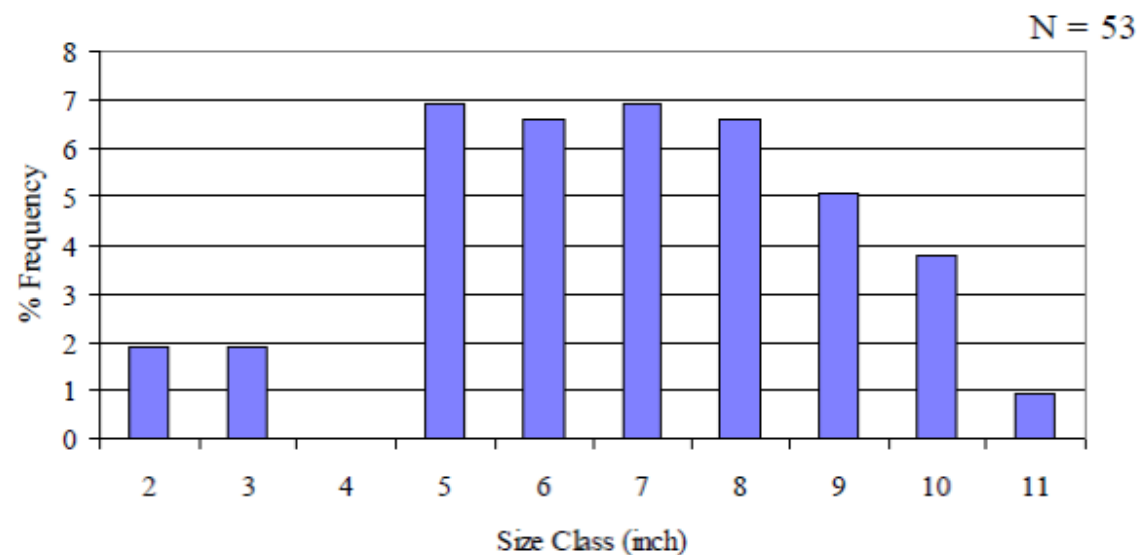


Figure 3: Sizes of Redear Sunfish collected from Gatewood Reservoir during May 2018 electrofishing. The total number collected was 53.



Black Crappie

Black Crappie size ranges have remained consistent since 2005, with 51 to 71 percent of the adult crappie (over 5 inches) over 8 inches long. In a May 2018 electrofishing sample, 68% of the adult Black Crappie (over 5 inches) collected were over 8 inches and 21% were over 10 inches. Fishing for crappie is best during the month of April, when spawning fish are in shallow areas of the lake. Black Crappie can also be caught year-round on beaver lodges.

Other Species

Yellow Perch are not as numerous as they were 15 years ago, but anglers are encouraged to keep taking them home. Smallmouth Bass provide opportunity for anglers to catch occasional 2 to 3 pound fish. Channel Catfish are stocked every year, and an occasional 20 pounder is caught.

Fishing is regulated by the size and creel limits in Table 1. If you catch a species not listed in this table, consult a VDGIF Fishing regulation book for size and creel limits (<https://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/media/creel-and-length-limits.pdf>).

Table 1: Fishing regulations at Gatewood Reservoir

Species	Size Limit	Creel Limit
Bluegill and other sunfish	None	50 per day total
Black Crappie	None	25 per day
Channel Catfish	18 inch minimum size	5 per day
Largemouth Bass and Smallmouth Bass	12 inch minimum size	5 bass per day combined
Yellow Perch	None	None

Location and More Information

Only electric motors are allowed on the lake. Fishing boats with electric motors are available for rent and private boats with electric motors may be launched. Equipment, fishing supplies, and some grocery items are available at the park store. More information about fishing hours, boat rentals, and camping are available at <https://gatewoodpark.com/>.

To travel to the lake from Interstate 81, take the Pulaski Exit (Exit 94, Rt. 99 North), continue through the town of Pulaski. Route 99 will become Third Street. Turn left at Randolph Avenue, go one block, turn right on West Main Street, go 3 blocks, turn right on Magazine Street, go one block, and turn left on Mt. Olivet Road (Route 710). Travel 2.3 miles to a hard surface road on right, go 6 miles from this turn to the park. The approximate travel time from Interstate 81 to the park is 20 minutes. The address listed on the Gatewood Park website is 200 Campground Road, Pulaski, VA 24301.

For more information on this reservoir, take a look at the website above, call Gatewood Park at (540) 230-2023 or email to reservations@gatewoodpark.com, call the Town of Pulaski Department of Parks and Facilities at (540) 994-8624, or email Fisheries Biologist John Copeland at John.Copeland@dgif.virginia.gov.